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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN SCO SUMMIT MEDIA REACTION - CAREFUL BALANCE OF INTERESTS

Ref: Dushanbe 1107

¶1. (U) Summary: Tajikistan's political analysts expressed few expectations from the SCO summit in the weekly papers prior to the summit, except that Russia would seek support for its actions in Georgia and recognition of independence for South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Most commentators praised Russian actions in Georgia, which they interpreted as a resurgence of Russian power. Comments after the summit focused on the divisions within the SCO, as reflected in China's and Uzbekistan's refusal to recognize the independence of Georgia's separatist regions. Other analysis focused on the bilateral benefits for Tajikistan from the summit and what those relationships mean for investment in the hydro-electric power sector. End summary

Pre Summit - Careful Balance of Interests Predicted  
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¶2. (U) On the eve of the summit August 27, Tajikistan's weekly papers anticipated that Russia would seek SCO support for its actions in Georgia and recognition of independence for South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Centrist "Tojikiston" predicted that the members would be "careful" in response to avoid alienating foreign partners like the U.S., which built the Nizhniy Pyanj bridge in the south, and Iran, which built the Anzob tunnel north of Dushanbe. Abdunabi Sattorzoda, an analyst with the government sponsored Center for Strategic Studies, was quoted in the article saying he had no particular expectations, because SCO member states had over the years signed 339 cooperation agreements that had so far yielded no visible results. A report in progressive "Farazh" said Central Asian states could not choose between Russia and the West, because each had developed its own relations with the United States and NATO.

"Cold War" Resumes - Russia 1, U.S. 0  
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¶3. (U) Also on August 27, centrist "Kurier Tajikistana" expressed concern that the "information war" between Russia and the U.S. regarding Georgia might lead to real war between the two powers. The paper criticized Georgian president Mikhail Saakashvili for portraying Russia as the aggressor in world media. He said the international community should instead be condemning "Saakashvili's genocide against the people of South Ossetia," just as it had condemned the genocide in Kosovo.

¶4. (U) Masud Sobirov, leader of the government recognized wing of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan, commented in "Farazh" August 27 that he supported Russia's peacekeeping in the region, which he said proved that "Russia would decide sovereignty issues in Georgia, not the United States." He also praised the way power was transferred from Yeltsin to Putin and Putin to Medvedev, which meant a more "consistent policy" and helped Russia re-establish itself as a

powerful state. In a front page article for centrist "Vecherniy Dushanbe," Rajab Safarov, head of the Moscow-based "Center for Study of Modern Iran," said that the United States' "Georgian project" was engineered to ensure Georgia's accession to NATO, which failed due to Russia's "quick and effective response." He said Russia could counterbalance aggressive plans by the U.S. and NATO by annexing South Ossetia and Abkhazia; by strengthening military ties with Lebanon and Syria; restoring its military presence in Cuba; and accelerating SCO membership for Iran. "Tojikistan" published a Qaccelerating SCO membership for Iran. "Tojikistan" published a dissenting view September 4, claiming Russian "interference" was aimed at proving that "it still owns post Soviet states." The article described the Russian-Chechen conflict as "genocide" and supported Georgia's right to defend its territorial integrity.

#### "Georgia Issue" Not Ready for Prime Time

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15. (U) After the summit concluded August 28, President Rahmon held a press briefing at which he took no questions but read a statement citing the "considerable work" done over the past year in security, trade, science and cultural exchanges, with no mention of Georgia. The official government television networks followed his cue and ran 10-minute primetime news reports that highlighted the numerous agreements that were signed to continue cooperation in anti-terrorism and anti-narcotics between SCO members. The reports did not mention Georgia or the "Dushanbe Declaration" which expressed "concern" over tension in South Ossetia, called for "efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, and praised Russia's role in these efforts.

#### Summit Boosts Tajikistan's Bilateral Relationships

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16. (U) Political analyst Abdugani Mamadazimov commented in centrist "Asia Plus" that the summit had been an opportunity for Tajikistan to strengthen bilateral relations with individual member states. He said warm congratulations were offered to President Hu Jintao for the Chinese athletes' performance at the Olympics, but "no one rushed to congratulate Russia for their victory in the Caucasus," preferring to maintain a "careful" position vis-a-vis Russian-Georgian relations articulated in the Dushanbe Declaration. He said the meetings between Hu Jintao and Tajikistan's ministries and Parliament augured well for Tajik-Chinese cooperation progressing beyond the current level. He expressed hope for improved relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan after the "warm embrace" between Presidents Rahmon and Karimov at the summit. Mamadzimov doubted that Iran, Pakistan, India and Afghanistan would be offered full SCO membership because of issues unique to each case: Indian-Pakistani territorial disputes; Afghanistan being dominated by western forces; and increased tensions in the Middle Eastern if Iran joined the organization.

#### More Divides than Unites SCO

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17. (U) Many papers noted that the two "sensations" - membership for Iran and recognition of independence for Georgia's separatist regions - failed to materialize, primarily because of China's concern about its own restless regions. Social Democratic Party leader Rahmatillo Zoirov commented in "Vecherniy Dushanbe" that the SCO had not realized its full potential because member states did not have equal stature or voice in the organization and the states themselves blocked each other's ambitions.

#### Hydro Power Suitors Compete for Tajikistan's Favor

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18. (U) A Radio Free Europe report with experts' comments on hydro-electric projects in Tajikistan was reprinted in progressive "Jomea." Political analyst Parviz Mullojanov said SCO membership had benefited Tajikistan economically by expanding the range of potential partners and thwarting Russia's attempts to scare off other investors. He said China had planned to build three

hydro-electric plants in Tajikistan, but only one agreement for Nurobod-2 was signed. According to energy expert Gulomiddin Saifiddinov, Tajikistan was better off working with countries like China and Iran that had "only economic interests in Tajikistan" (compared to political strings that that would be attached to Russian investments). Mirzosharif Islomiddinov, the head of Parliament's energy and industry committee, said a competition over resources was natural and Tajikistan's economy would only win from foreign investments if Tajikistan handled them "in the right way." The article concluded, "Tajikistan can choose its own partners."

¶9. (U) Centrist "Sobitiya" described the August 29 bilateral meeting between Medvedev and Rahmon as mutually beneficial because Russia got Rahmon's support for its actions in South Ossetia, and Tajikistan got Russia's promise to build three hydro-electric stations and to complete the long stalled Roghun project. The paper included Rahmon's statement calling Russia and Tajikistan "natural strategic partners and allies," which meant coordination and support of each others' actions, "including those undertaken by Russia in the Caucasuses to establish peace;" and his preference for "political and diplomatic means of resolving such disputes."

U.S. "Iran Plans" Foiled by Russian Action in Georgia?  
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¶10. (U) Also on September 4, "Asia Plus" carried a Russian reprint from [www.worldcrisis.ru](http://www.worldcrisis.ru) that claimed analysis of military equipment including radar jammers provided by the U.S. and used by Georgian troops in the conflict in South Ossetia proved the United States had planned an air attack on Iran for early September, but Russia's response foiled those plans. The author claimed that the United States was still concentrating its military presence in that region under the cover of providing "humanitarian assistance."

Quast